



MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

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Secretary

Anthony G. Brown
Lieutenant Governor

March 31, 2014

The Honorable Anne Healey, Chairperson
Members, Rules and Executive Nominations Committee
House Office Building, Room
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Letter of Information, Senate Joint Resolution 4 – Conowingo Dam – Sediment - Dredging

Dear Chairperson Healey and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) has reviewed the Senate Joint Resolution 4 (SJ 4) entitled *Conowingo Dam – Sediment – Dredging*, and we would like to provide information related to this resolution.

The intent of the proposed resolution is to urge the United States Congress to authorize and fully fund a project by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to dredge sediment behind the Conowingo Dam in order to preserve the Dam's capability to block pollutants in the Susquehanna River from reaching the Chesapeake Bay. Currently, several activities are occurring at both the State and Federal levels to determine both the water quality impacts associated with sediments behind Conowingo Dam as well as the most cost-effective strategies for managing those sediments.

One such activity is a study, the Lower Susquehanna River Watershed Assessment (LSRWA), which is a joint project between the State of Maryland and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The goal of LSRWA is to quantify sediments and associated nutrients coming into Chesapeake Bay from both the watershed and the four hydroelectric dams on the lower Susquehanna River during high flow storm events and determine their impacts on Bay water quality. The preliminary results of this study confirm that the current conditions in Conowingo Reservoir, assuming full Chesapeake Bay TMDL implementation, would result in a water quality impairment in three segments which are the mainstem of Chesapeake Bay, the Chester River and Eastern Bay. The impairments are determined to be a result of the nutrients associated with the sediment and not the sediments alone. The study also evaluates the cost-effectiveness of solutions to manage the sediment and the nutrients associated with those sediments.

The mitigation solutions evaluated range from various types of dredging to increased implementation of upstream land based practices (e.g. forest buffers, nutrient management, etc.) and a final recommendation has not yet been reported. The LSRWA identified additional data, analysis and information needs that will allow further refinement and better quantification of the nutrient water quality impact associated with Conowingo sediments and will continue to inform appropriate management actions.



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The State is currently negotiating with Exelon on the relicensing of Conowingo Dam. A more complete understanding of water quality impacts of sediments and associated nutrients behind Conowingo Dam reported in the LSRWA and the implications of the recommendations for further monitoring and analysis will be necessary for the State to issue a water quality certification for this project. Until all of these details are resolved it will be difficult to determine the best and most cost effective management alternative.

Thank you for your consideration of this information. We will continue to monitor SJ 4 during the Committee's deliberations, and I am available to answer any questions you may have. Please contact me at 410-260-6301 or jeffrey.fretwell@maryland.gov if you would like to discuss any of these issues further.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey Fretwell

cc: Lee Currey, Director, Science Services Administration
Samantha Kappalman, Director, Legislation and Public Affairs

